

WASHINGTON - Earlier today, international news agencies reported U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates is expected to announce a formal agreement to establish a military hotline, or Defense Telephone Link, between the U.S. and China during his visit this week to the PRC.

In response, U.S. Reps. Rick Larsen (D-Wash.) and Mark Kirk (R-Ill.), the co-chairs of the 60-member bipartisan House U.S.-China Working Group, released the following joint statement:

"After nearly two years of intense dialogue and shuttle diplomacy, the establishment of a defense hotline between the U.S. and China marks a watershed moment in U.S.-China relations," Kirk and Larsen said. "When we first raised this issue with General Cao in January 2006, we noted that clear and direct lines of communication during times of crisis are critical to maintaining peace and security. We congratulate Secretary Gates and Minister Cao for this landmark achievement and look forward to building on this success in defense cooperation."